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THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER'S INTENT

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

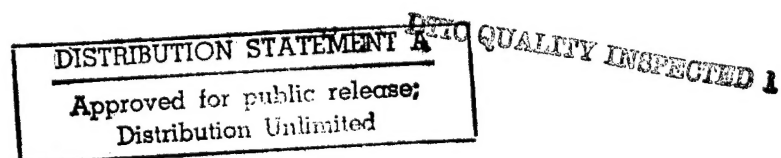
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**Abstract of**  
**The Operational Commander's Intent**

Effective operational level implementation of the concept of commander's intent has great potential for projecting the CINC's leadership. This potential is not realized today for many reasons: service and joint definitions and descriptions of the concept differ, the concept is not fully embraced and used by the Air Force and the Navy, and commanders have difficulty expressing good statements of commander's intent. Because the concept is misunderstood, the potential benefits are not appreciated and current statements of intent lack meaning. The great potential of the concept lies in its role in projecting the commander's leadership during the military planning process and during the implementation of plans developed during the planning process.

Implementation at the operational level can be particularly influential for naval and air forces with the capability to exert force over large portions of the theater. To fully realize the potential of commander's intent, several things must happen: all services must use the same planning process (as defined by joint publications), the definition and discussion of commander's intent in joint publications must be strengthened, commander's intent must be emphasized more by the Air Force and the Navy, and commander's intent should be reinforced during exercises. Effective teamwork and communication are becoming more important, and as a tool for focusing the team, commander's intent is also becoming more important. The driving force that can make all of this happen is recognition by operational level commanders that their leadership is reflected in their commander's intent.

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## **The Operational Commander's Intent**

### **Introduction**

The concept of commander's intent can be used by commanders at all levels as a tool to guide planning and execution of military operations. Central to the deliberate planning process is the operational level planning performed by the combatant commander-in-chief (CINC) and his staff. Commander's intent developed by the CINC plays an important role in the commander's estimate of the situation, the decision on a course of action, and the development and implementation of plans by subordinate commanders. Studying the concept of commander's intent leads to the conclusion that utilizing meaningful statements of commander's intent from the operational commander could be very important in joint military operations, but several problems arise when trying to understand and apply the concept. First, although commander's intent is described in Army, Marine Corps and joint publications, there are differences in definitions and how the concept is applied. Second, the concept is not fully embraced and used by the Air Force and the Navy. Third, and last, commanders are unable to express good statements of commander's intent. The root cause of these problems is that the concept is not fully understood, and the benefits of the concept are not appreciated. The net result is that there is confusion during joint planning about the role of commander's intent, and the lack of commitment to the concept makes it impossible to achieve the high potential that commander's intent offers.

The potential of the concept will be realized better as the definitions and meaning of commander's intent are presented. In short, the concept could provide a clarity to planning military operations that could be possible only if the commander was directly involved

throughout the planning process. During execution, the commander would also be ever present, or in constant communication. This type of guidance by competent leaders could be a benefit, but it is impossible to do continually. Only via the mechanism of commander's intent can the same result be achieved. Note that both in planning and execution the benefit of commander's intent is derived from good leadership. When commanders recognize that their commander's intent exemplifies their leadership ability, they will be willing to give it the attention it deserves and then the benefits will be achieved.

### **The Importance of Operational Level Intent**

Meaningful implementation of commander's intent at the operational level is key because the operational level links the aims formed at the strategic level to the application of force at the operational and tactical levels. Operational level implementation produces theater wide influence over large numbers of forces from all of the services. All CINCs employ naval forces in maritime theaters and wide reaching air forces. Characteristic of these naval and air forces is their potential for a large scale impact in the theater of operation. As a tool to help guide, manage and lead on this scale, commander's intent is unique in its potential. What is lacking, yet necessary, to realize the benefits of commander's intent, is effective joint operational level implementation of the concept that will serve all joint forces equally. This will ensure that the meaning and influence of the operational commander's intent on all fighting forces is the same. Joint operational level implementation means that the joint operational level planning process described in joint publications should be used by all services. Our military forces would then be using the same planning concepts, resulting in a better common understanding of the planned operations.

## **The Commander's Intent and Estimate of the Situation**

One of the keys to successful military operations is planning. Planning may be in the form of deliberate planning, or crisis action planning, but, in each case, the process starts with the National Command Authority (NCA) providing military objectives that support national policy. The geographic combatant commanders, or CINCs, use this guidance to develop theater plans. The first, and most critical phase of the CINC's planning process is the commander's estimate of the situation (CES), illustrated in Figure 1, during which commander's intent plays its first important role.

In the process of developing the commander's estimate<sup>1</sup>, the CINC first analyzes the mission. Analysis entails restating the superior's mission and intent. Then the task, or tasks, and their purpose, are reviewed. The CINC then formulates his mission statement. Next, any limitations on the planned action, changes to the Rules of Engagement and assumptions are considered for their impact on the CINC's mission. Each objective is then identified, and the CINC restates his mission and writes his initial intent. This process ensures that the CINC's mission will meet the national objectives, and provides the basis to complete the commander's estimate of the situation. The CINC may also elect to issue a warning order at this time to alert subordinate commanders of the proposed military action. Key highlights related to commander's intent of this first step, the mission analysis, are that mission consists of task or tasks, and purpose, and should be clearly and simply stated, and, the commander's initial intent is stated to provide vision for the remainder of the commander's estimate.

The estimate next identifies any factors that may affect courses of action, such as characteristics of the area of operations, or relative combat power of the opposing forces.

Enemy capabilities and own courses of action are then determined, analyzed and compared to arrive at the goal of the commander's estimate--the decision. The decision clearly states which course of action the CINC has selected, and lays out his concept of operations. In the concept of operations, the CINC's final intent is stated to provide the next two levels of subordinate commanders guidance for their planning. We can see from this process that the commander's intent continues to provide guidance for subsequent planning, and can be influential in shaping events in the CINC's theater.

### **From Planning to Execution**

The decision resulting from the commander's estimate guides planning for subordinate commanders. When plans developed by subordinate commanders are implemented, their commander's intent guides the forces without necessarily being in direct contact with them. A given situation may change and impact the assigned mission, but the intent and overall objectives of the mission are not likely to change. Armed with knowledge of their commander's intent, subordinate leaders can take advantage of opportunities when they are able. Understanding the intent of an operation allows local control and execution, with first-hand knowledge of the current situation. The advantages of this are obvious; it provides synergy to the overall command and control of the campaign, and allows for efficient and effective application of force amidst the fog and friction of war. Each service can benefit from well thought out scripting of the operational level commander's intent. It costs little other than the time required to develop and disseminate it, and it is relatively unconstrained by procedures and bureaucracy. Application of the concept by operational level commanders could in fact be a driving force for developing and implementing effective joint doctrine.



The benefits of the operational level commander's intent have not always been realized in recent history. During Desert Storm, the statement of commander's intent, shown in Appendix A, caused problems for the Army. The intent dated 14 November indicated to the VII Corps planners that they should directly attack the Republican Guards Forces (RGFC) and destroy them, and a plan was formulated to accomplish that. During the operation, CINCCENT ordered the VII Corps to accelerate their attack, even though the Corp movement was ahead of the originally planned schedule. CINCCENT failed to clearly express his real intent for the operation.<sup>2</sup> Had the commander's intent clearly expressed what CINCCENT wanted, the plan and subsequent operation could have been in line with his desires. However, neither the movement of troops, nor the specific vision for defeating the Republican Guards was expressed in the intent statement. With the RGFC as an important center of gravity, the commander's intent should have addressed specifically the results the commander wanted, and a broad vision of how it was to be achieved.

### **Navy and Marine Application of Commander's Intent**

Navy planning as described in NWP 11, Naval Operational Planning, in the format for commander's estimate of the situation and Operation Orders (OPORDs), does not specifically use the term commander's intent.<sup>3</sup> However, the process for the commander's estimate described in NWP 11 refers to commander's intent to derive the mission. It states, "If the superior's directive contains a subparagraph titled "Commander's Intent," that subparagraph should also be reviewed when developing the purpose."<sup>4</sup> NWP 11 further states that purpose dominates task, because under changing conditions, tasks may change but the intent of the operation will not likely change.<sup>5</sup> A more effective way to create a clear vision of what is to be

accomplished is to consider the task and purpose simply as describing the mission, and write a separate description of commander's intent to provide additional insight and leadership. This requires commander's intent to be defined, and its role in the planning process explained.

The style of order using task and purpose, without addressing intent, was used during World War II. An example is described in Appendix B in MacArthur's plan for invading the Philippines. It is easy with this format for each commander to get an overview of the entire operation, and the purpose of each of their assigned objectives. From MacArthur's order the mission is to "continue the offensive to reoccupy the PHILIPPINES by seizing and occupying objectives... [to] ...establish therein naval, air and logistics facilities for the support of subsequent operations."<sup>6</sup> The commander's vision of the campaign end state is objectives secured to continue further military operations, and, based on this description, each subordinate commander is expected to understand the operation. However, it does not fully express the commander's intent, describe how the commander expects to utilize his own troops, or explain how the enemy is expected to respond. This illustrates how simply describing the "end state" does not accurately convey the commander's intent. Including the action and the purpose in one statement is a simple format, and it alleviates the problem of commanders simply restating the mission when trying to state their intent. However, it does not convey the spirit of commander's intent, it simply restates the mission. It also does not provide the leadership depth to commander's intent that can allow it to achieve its potential.

For example, assume the following intent was inserted in MacArthur's order:

Commander's Intent: To employ all available land, naval and air forces to re-take the Philippines with numerical superiority, hence minimal risk. Expect the enemy to take the offensive to try to break our will to re-take the islands. To protect the vulnerable

amphibious landing troops, land and carrier based air forces will attack and destroy first enemy aircraft, and then ships in the area. Naval forces will guard the approaches to Leyte Gulf and destroy enemy naval forces attempting to threaten the amphibious forces. After the amphibious landing is secure, further offensive operations against Japanese naval forces will resume to impede the enemy's ability to supply and reinforce the islands. When land forces are firmly established a secure base of operations for further action in the theater will be established.

This statement is comprehensive, and provides guidance that subordinate commanders can use for planning and conducting the operation in Leyte Gulf. Specifically, it includes a vision of the following features that should be included in commander's intent:

- ° Describes the CINC's vision of how friendly forces will be utilized in the theater.
- ° Describes the anticipated enemy response, and how the commander expects to win.
- ° Describes the role of each component in helping to achieve the desired result.
- ° Describes only military conditions, including the greatest risk to our own forces.
- ° Describes the conditions at the end of the planned military action, and the relationship to subsequent actions.

The commander's intent from this statement is also useful as the operation commences in the theater. Perhaps, if this intent statement had been available during the actual Leyte Gulf operation, Admiral Halsey would not have made the decision to go after the Japanese carriers, and the amphibious operation would not have been vulnerable. Commander's intent for the operation could have made a difference then, just as it can in today's environment.

The Marine Corps concept of commander's intent is described in FMFM 1,

Warfighting, in the chapter titled *The Conduct of War*. The Marines recognize

“two parts to a mission: the task to be accomplished and the reason, or intent. The task describes the action to be taken while the intent describes the desired result of the action. Of the two, the intent is predominant. While a situation may change, making

the task obsolete, the intent is more permanent and continues to guide our actions. Understanding our commander's intent allows us to exercise initiative in harmony with the commander's desires."<sup>7</sup>

Marine Corps literature uses "end state" to help define commander's intent, but the Marines are careful to point out that this end state includes not only a commander's force, but the enemy forces and the terrain as well. Commander's intent "may include... the purpose of the operation, the enemy's action and intentions and an identification of the enemy's critical vulnerability or center of gravity."<sup>8</sup> The essence of the Marine Corps application of commander's intent comes from the recognition that once a battle begins, it is not possible to truly control the forces. In the absence of positive control, the commander's intent gives "subordinates the authority to plan and execute their own actions."<sup>9</sup> Marines believe that expressing the commander's intent requires more than experience, it requires the ability to create accurate mental images of the situation, decide on an effective approach, and convey that to subordinates. It provides subordinates a complete picture, when combined with the other information gained from intelligence briefings, mission oriented orders, and plans that will allow a subordinate commander to contribute to the overall mission goals. This will remain true even if a specific mission is changed due to interaction on the battlefield.<sup>10</sup>

The Marine concept is appropriate in that it recognizes the predominance of intent over the task, and it legitimizes the initiative and authority of subordinates working to meet their superior's intent. However, use of "end state" and "purpose" as descriptors of commander's intent is inappropriate. End state is often used in reference to non-military conditions, and purpose confuses intent with the mission statement. Only by clearly defining the terms can the principles be accurately applied and the potential realized.

## **Air Force Application of the Concept**

Air Force doctrine recognizes that their missions must be designed to carry out the superior commander's intent, but the Air Force does not stress intent. AFM 1-1, Vol 1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, states "The essence of aerospace operational art is the planning and employment of air and space assets to maximize their contribution to the combatant commander's intent."<sup>11</sup> Use of the concept is further addressed for the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) in the description of developing the JFACC's estimate of the situation. USAF JFACC Primer, Second Edition states that during the development of COAs, the JFACC will

a. State commander's intent

- (1) Identify desired end state
- (2) Strategy (Blueprint or pattern). Describe underlying logic<sup>12</sup>

This shows an attempt to define the concept, but again, the spirit of commander's intent is not expressed, nor can the benefits of commander's intent be fully realized on this basis. The definition is equally as lacking as the Navy's, leaving the potential for commander's intent still not met. Specifically, the Air Force definition errs by using "end state" and "strategy" to define the concept. A more comprehensive definition and description of commander's intent are required to understand the concept and gain the benefits of its use.

The Air Force planning document, AFMAN 10-401, Operation Plan and Concept Plan Development, has no specific reference to commander's intent in its description of the commander's estimate process, but does address "purpose". The Air Force format and content of OPLANS in this document, under paragraph 3, EXECUTION, addresses intent with the words, "State in the concept how the commander intends to carry out the mission."<sup>13</sup>

The manual uses many references to the joint planning process, implying that the joint process may heavily influence Air Force planning, but there is no assurance this will happen.

### **The Army Concept of Commander's Intent**

Army experience with commander's intent is useful when one attempts to define the concept. From the Army's FM 100-5, Operations, commander's intent describes the

desired end state. It is a concise expression of the purpose of the operation and must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander. It must clearly state the purpose of the mission. It is the single unifying focus for all subordinate elements. It is not a summary of the concept of the operation. Its purpose is to focus subordinates on what has to be accomplished in order to achieve success, even when the plan and concept of operations no longer apply, and to discipline their efforts toward that end.<sup>14</sup>

The Army concept captures a few significant aspects of the principle, yet falls short of the full potential. The Army points out how intent must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander. This is significant from the operational commander's perspective, because it defines the limit of his influence via commander's intent. It is also significant that the Army recognizes that intent is not simply a summary of the concept of operations. However, use of "end state" and "purpose" in the Army definition will again confuse the terminology, which does not allow commander's intent to achieve its potential.

### **Joint Use of Commander's Intent**

Joint publications also address the issue and importance of commander's intent. Per Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations,

**The commander's intent describes the desired end state. It is a concise expression of the purpose of the operation, not a summary of the concept of operations.** It may include how the posture of units at that end state facilitates transition to future operations. It may also include the commander's assessment of the enemy commander's intent.<sup>15</sup>

Joint doctrine further recognizes that the plan must be “flexible enough to permit leaders to seize opportunities consistent with the commander’s intent, thus facilitating quick and accurate decisionmaking during operations.”<sup>16</sup> **“The JFC’s intent helps subordinates pursue the desired end state** without further orders, even when operations do not unfold as planned. Thus, the commander’s intent **provides focus** for all subordinate elements.”<sup>17</sup> As in the Army and Marine Corps definitions of commander’s intent, there are good and bad features in the joint description of commander’s intent. The problems are similar, most notably the use of “end state” and “purpose”.

### **NATO Application of Commander’s Intent**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) uses a process for the commander’s estimate of the situation identical to that illustrated in Figure 1. What is unique about NATO’s approach is recognition of the important role of commander’s intent. Commander’s intent is described in ANNEX 3B to AJP-1(A), Allied Joint Operations Doctrine. This annex is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix C because it provides a comprehensive discussion of the topic that captures all of the significant points regarding commander’s intent. Highlights of NATO treatment of commander’s intent include:

- ° Intent includes conduct and outcome of the operation.
- ° Intent provides visualization of how the commander intends to move from the current situation to the conditions at the end of the operation.
- ° Intent must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander to facilitate subordinate commander’s preparation of their own orders.
- ° Intent address how to transition to future operations.

- ° Its focus is on the force as a whole.
- ° Intent provides a framework within which subordinate commanders operate.
- ° By focusing on desired results rather than sequential events, commanders can operate with increased speed and efficiency in decision making.
- ° Because of its criticality, commanders need to personally prepare their intent.

The NATO treatment could cause confusion by use of "end state", but the depth of the explanation minimizes this risk when the NATO description is taken as a whole. This provides a good example of the type of guidance on commander's intent needed in joint publications.

### **The Operational Commander's Influence Through His Intent**

It is useful now to re-examine the Gulf War intent statement in Appendix A to examine the relationship that can exist between the operational commander's intent, doctrine, tactics and training philosophy. The example concerns interdiction missions in Baghdad on the second day of the war and illustrates how the operational level commander's intent can be used to insure operations accomplish their tasks in the way intended by the leaders and our fighting philosophy.

CINCCENT's intent applied to two levels down. For air forces, this path is through the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC), then tasked units. His intent should therefore have influenced how those forces were employed. The intent indicates several missions for air forces during the campaign, but does not address the level of risk. Interdiction missions over Baghdad were planned to include suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD), but were continued at a much greater risk, when SEAD was not available.<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. philosophy is to minimize risk and casualties by employing high technology



and overwhelming force. Conduct of these interdiction missions was contrary to this philosophy and aircraft were shot down. Stating the level of risk CINCCENT wanted to assume could have been an important aspect of his commander's intent, particularly since the U.S. led coalition controlled the tempo of the war from the beginning. Only leadership from the CINC can affect the attitudes on this scale in a given theater, and commander's intent is one vehicle for exerting this type of leadership.

This example also points out how services are affected differently by the operational commander's intent during execution. Both air and naval forces, because of their broad realm and potentially large impact should be more directly influenced by the operational level commander's intent than soldiers working in a more restricted geographical sense. The soldiers need the more specific intent of their commander to function properly while air and naval forces need a more theater wide perspective of intent. The traditional view of Air Force and Navy commanders is that commander's intent is implicit in the tasking or assigned mission, any special instructions and the ROE, and they do not labor over forming intent for missions as their Army and Marine counterparts do. For air and naval forces the operational commander's intent can help to place the current mission in context with training philosophies, doctrine and other interests, such as the desire to minimize casualties. Navy and Air Force officers are trained to take initiative and they enjoy being "captain" of their own ship. Centralized command and control and decentralized action are part of their doctrine, but this doctrine should not be at odds with the commander's intent or other U.S. philosophies.

### **A Recipe for Writing Commander's Intent**

It becomes apparent from reviewing the service and joint literature on commander's

intent that there are differences and the guidance fails to achieve the full potential from commander's intent. Limiting the definition simply to "purpose" undermines what the mission should be--task *and* purpose--and creates confusion when one then attempts to state intent. Using the term "end state" creates confusion because of the common use of "end state" when referring to a political rather than a military condition. Also, as was illustrated in MacArthur's example, end state alone cannot completely convey intent. It does not help to understand how this condition is to be achieved, and thus does not convey intent of the operation.

Current descriptions of commander's intent do not express the leadership potential of commander's intent. Commander's intent projects the commander's leadership in his absence. This leadership is embodied by the vision communicated in his intent statement, and the subsequent guidance it provides to his forces. The CINC's critical analysis of how the planned military action in his theater is linked to strategic aims is critical to our philosophy, and is one of the key responsibilities of the CINC.

The review of service application of commander's intent shows that the concept is not fully embraced by the Air Force and the Navy. To give intent equal meaning to all services, the commander's intent from the operational level commander must convey the significant contribution expected by each component in the joint war fighting environment. If done properly this would ensure intent is useful to all troops without being a burden. Further, emphasis on understanding the *operational level* commander's intent enhances unity of effort.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to realizing the full potential of commander's intent is the difficulty expressing a clear and concise intent statement. Given current definitions of commander's intent, the concept is misunderstood and difficult to implement effectively.

Current guidance does not tell CINCs and planners how to write an effective statement of commander's intent. The difficulty, for any officer at any level, is articulating an effective commander's intent. Experience demonstrates that we will fight the way we are trained, so we should strive to train the way we fight, even at the operational level. For something with the potential usefulness (according to our own doctrine) of commander's intent, there is no reason it can not be practiced, critiqued and honed so it can live up to its potential.

Having looked at the descriptions of commander's intent in existing doctrine and some examples of commander's intent, it is now time to define the concept. Commander's intent is *the commander's vision of the events which occur after commencing military action in the theater. It includes how our forces will attempt to shape the environment, the desired enemy response to planned actions, and other significant conditions envisioned during the operation. It should also include the desired military conditions at the end of the operation and describe the level of risk the commander is willing to accept. The commander's intent provides leadership for critical decision making, planning and implementing plans.* The words "end state" are intentionally left out of the definition because they get confused with the political conditions following military action. Commander's intent is strictly concerned with the military conditions in the CINC's theater. Commanders should refrain from simply restating their concept of operations, and should not assume that subordinates can interpret or deduce what the intent is by the assigned targets, objectives, or mission. In addition, a re-statement of ROE or other important-not-to-forget information is not appropriate for the commander's intent. It dilutes the meaning of commander's intent, and is redundant. There is one last thing that commanders should keep in mind when writing their intent; a statement of

intent does not have to be all of the things listed above, it can be one, two, or several, depending on the operation. Only if appropriate should something be included in the statement of intent, providing the leadership the commander deems necessary.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This discussion of commander's intent illustrates how it can provide vision for decision making and planning, and enhance command and control during military operations. These benefits are often overshadowed by problems with stating commander's intent. As one small but significant part of the complex task of planning, commander's intent is sometimes viewed as less important than the other details of how an operation is going to be accomplished. When staffs and commanders are pressed for time, the less understood and sometimes forgotten commander's intent is given little attention. Because statements of intent from operational level commanders lack meaning, they may be ignored, particularly by air and naval forces. This lack of emphasis deters the concept from reaching its full potential.

To give commander's intent the significance it deserves, the following recommendations should be implemented:

- ° References to commander's intent in joint publications need to be strengthened. This would entail adding a definition similar to the one used in this paper, enhancing the discussion of the concept, as illustrated by NATO, and providing a good example. Key to clarity is ensuring that intent and mission are separate, clear and distinct.
- ° All services should utilize the planning process, to include commander's intent, as defined in joint publications.
- ° Intent should be emphasized more by the Navy and the Air Force, with the primary

focus being at the operational level, and secondary focus being on the intent of specific tactical operations that these forces are involved in.

- ° Commander's intent should be reinforced during exercises by commanders stating their intent, and in scenario based training, standing statements of intent should be used. Particularly in joint training exercises commanders need to ensure the intent of each component's actions are understood.
- ° Operational commander's must realize that their leadership is reflected in their intent because of the influence it has on planning and executing military operations.

In a world with a smaller U.S. military, where effective communication and teamwork are becoming more important, commander's intent is also becoming more important. It is a tool for focusing the team, whether they are a planning team or an execution team, that can help the team achieve unity of effort and success. Commander's intent can help to realign philosophies and doctrine to ensure they are not at odds with one another. If operational commanders find they are constantly addressing topics in intent in the same manner, then perhaps it is time to include that topic in doctrine. This aspect could be particularly relevant as the services work more and more in joint operations using joint doctrine.

The need for all of us in the military to carry out our missions according to our superior's intent cannot be denied. However, we cannot assume that intent is universally understood. Commanders must make their intent clear to all forces, and all forces must use intent to shape their actions. Only in this manner will all forces be working towards a common goal through the operational level commander's leadership.

## NOTES

1. The planning process used to illustrate the application of commander's intent in this paper is the one currently taught at the Naval War College, which differs slightly from the planning process described in joint or service publications.
2. Interview, 2 May 96, with Col. Tom Waller, assigned to VII Corps as the Assistant Fire Support Coordinator in the Tactical Command Post during the Gulf War.
3. U.S. Navy Dept., Naval Operational Planning, NWP 11 (Rev. F), (Washington: September 1991), B-2, C-2.
4. Ibid, 2-5.
5. Ibid.
6. GHQ SWPA Warning Instns 5, 31 Aug 44, quoted in M. Hamlin Cannon, Leyte: The Return to the Philippines (Washington: Center of Military History United States Army, 1953), 371.
7. U.S. Marine Corps, Warfighting, FMFM 1 (Washington: 6 March 1989), 71.
8. Capt Michael L. Ettore, "Commander's Intent Defined," Marine Corps Gazette, April 1993, 52-53.
9. Capt Eric S. Downes, USMCR, "The Decline of the Mission/The Rise of Intent," Marine Corps Gazette, April 1993, 50.
10. Ibid.
11. U.S. Department of the Air Force, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, AFM 1-1, Vol. 1 (Washington: March 1992), 10.
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## Appendix A

### CINCCENT's Intent During the Gulf War

One recent example of the use of commander's intent is CINCCENT's initial message of intent dated 25 August 1990 for Desert Storm planning. It stated

*We will offset the imbalance of ground combat power by using our strength against his weakness. Initially execute deception operations to focus his attention on defense and cause incorrect organization of forces. We will initially attack into the Iraqi homeland using air power to decapitate his leadership, command and control, and eliminate his ability to reinforce Iraqi forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq. We will then gain undisputed air superiority over Kuwait so that we can subsequently and selectively attack Iraqi ground forces with air power in order to reduce his combat power and destroy reinforcing units. Finally, we will fix Iraqi forces in place by feints and limited objective attacks followed by armored force penetration and exploitation to seize key lines of communication nodes, which will put us in a position to interdict resupply and remaining reinforcements from Iraq and eliminate forces in Kuwait.<sup>1</sup>*

The following statement of intent was briefed by CINCCENT on November 14, 1990 as he presented his concept of operations to all of his ground commanders down to the division level.

*Maximize friendly strength against Iraqi weakness and terminate offensive operations with the RGFC destroyed and major US forces controlling critical LOC's in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War Final Report to Congress (Washington: April 1992), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 317.

## Appendix B

### MacArthur's Leyte Operation

For the Leyte operation, MacArthur issued his first directive on 31 August 1944 stating his forces were to "seize objectives in the Mindanao, Leyte and Samar areas in order to establish air, naval and logistics bases to cover subsequent operations to complete the reoccupation of the Philippines."<sup>1</sup> The purpose typically followed an action, here "seize objectives...", and the words "in order to" or a similar expression. The purpose of the action was then addressed. MacArthur's initial statement gave the planners an area of operations and a reason for the operation from which to commence planning. Our usage today of this style, task followed by purpose, is simply referred to as the mission.

Changes were made to this original plan, but the Leyte operation stayed. Follow on details for this operation were laid out in GHQ Operations Instructions Number 70, 21 September 1944. Paragraph 2. a. states

Forces of the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, covered and supported by the THIRD FLEET, will continue the offensive to reoccupy the PHILIPPINES by seizing and occupying objectives in the LEYTE and western SAMAR areas, and will establish therein naval, air and logistics facilities for the support of subsequent operations.<sup>2</sup>

Each major military group participating in the operation subsequently had their objectives laid out in a similar manner. For example, paragraph 3. a. described the role of the Sixth US Army by stating

(1) By overwater operations seize and occupy:

(a) Objectives in the TACLOBAN and DULAG areas in LEYTE and such adjacent areas as are required to initiate and insure uninterrupted naval and air operations therefrom.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent paragraphs stated further objectives, with their purpose, for each of the components involved in the operation. In this case, one directive, the GHQ SWPA Opns Instns 70, 21 Sep 44, contained instructions from the overall commander and each component commander in one order.

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<sup>1</sup> GHQ SWPA Warning Instns 5, 31 Aug 44, quoted in M. Hamlin Cannon, Leyte: The Return to the Philippines (Washington: Center of Military History United States Army, 1953), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 371.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 372.

## Appendix C

### NATO AJP-1(A) ANNEX 3B - The Commander's Intent<sup>1</sup>

The following summary describes the meaning of the term 'commander's intent' as used in the campaign planning process.

For every mission, the commander determines what he wants to achieve and begins to develop how he plans for his force to accomplish the mission. This visualization embodies his intent for the conduct and outcome of the operation. It is a mental picture of the current and end-state, and how, based on the higher commander's intent, the information available and intuition, he plans to move from one to the other. The commander must transmit this vision to subordinates in clear and simple terms. He accomplished this through the articulation of the commander's intent. Later, the commander, assisted by the staff, will delineate the specific details of the operation through the concept of the operation. The commander's intent is the statement which provides the linkage between his vision and the concept of operations.

The commander's intent statement is the commander's personal expression of why an operation is being conducted and what he hopes to achieve. The intent is an expansion and expression of why a mission is to unfold. It is a clear and concise statement of a mission's overall purpose, the resulting end-state, and any essential information on how to get to that end-state; it must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander to facilitate subordinate commanders' preparation of their own orders.

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<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Allied Joint Operations Doctrine, AJP-1(A), 2<sup>nd</sup> Preliminary Draft, (NATO: undated), 3B-1.

The intent defines the end-state in relation to the factors of mission, adversary, operating environment, terrain, forces, time and preparation for future operations. As such, it addresses what results are expected from the operation, how these results anticipate transition to future operations, and how, in broad terms, the commander expects the force to achieve those results. Its focus is on the force as a whole. Additional information on how the force will achieve the desired results is provided only to clarify the commander's intentions. At issue is providing a description of how the entire force will conduct the operation sufficient to allow subordinates to proceed in a coordinated and synchronous manner.

The intent statement is the unifying concept for all elements of the force. It provides an overall framework within which subordinate commanders may operate, even when a plan or concept of operations no longer applies, or circumstances require subordinates to make decisions that support the ultimate goals of the force as a whole, rather than a set of sequenced events that may no longer reflect what 'makes sense' at that time or place.

In stating his intent, the issuing commander provides subordinates with the freedom to operate within the larger realm of the mission, rather than within the restrictions of a particular concept of operations or scheme of manoeuvre. The commander's intent provides subordinates with the flexibility to adapt their actions to achieve success. By focusing on the end-state rather than sequential events, it allows commanders to operate with increased speed and efficiency in decision-making. This allows subordinate forces, and hence the whole force, to operate faster, and with greater agility, than the adversary. This keeps the adversary off-balance and unable to respond coherently, because friendly forces are operating cohesively and are focused toward the same end-state.

The end-state focus supports the initiative of commanders at all levels by freeing them to focus on the results desired, even when the concept of the operation must be adapted to changing events, when communications are disrupted, or additional guidance or directives are lacking. The commander's intent provides subordinates the same opportunity of developing a vision of their own end-state, as it supports that of the force as a whole.

Because of its criticality, it is essential that the commander personally prepares and delivers his intent. While time constraints and combat conditions may require the commander to deliver his intent verbally, possibly even by radio or electronic means, it is best when he can provide it to subordinates personally and in written form. Written intent provides subordinates with the corner-stone of their planning, and face-to-face delivery ensures mutual understanding of what the issuing commander wants.

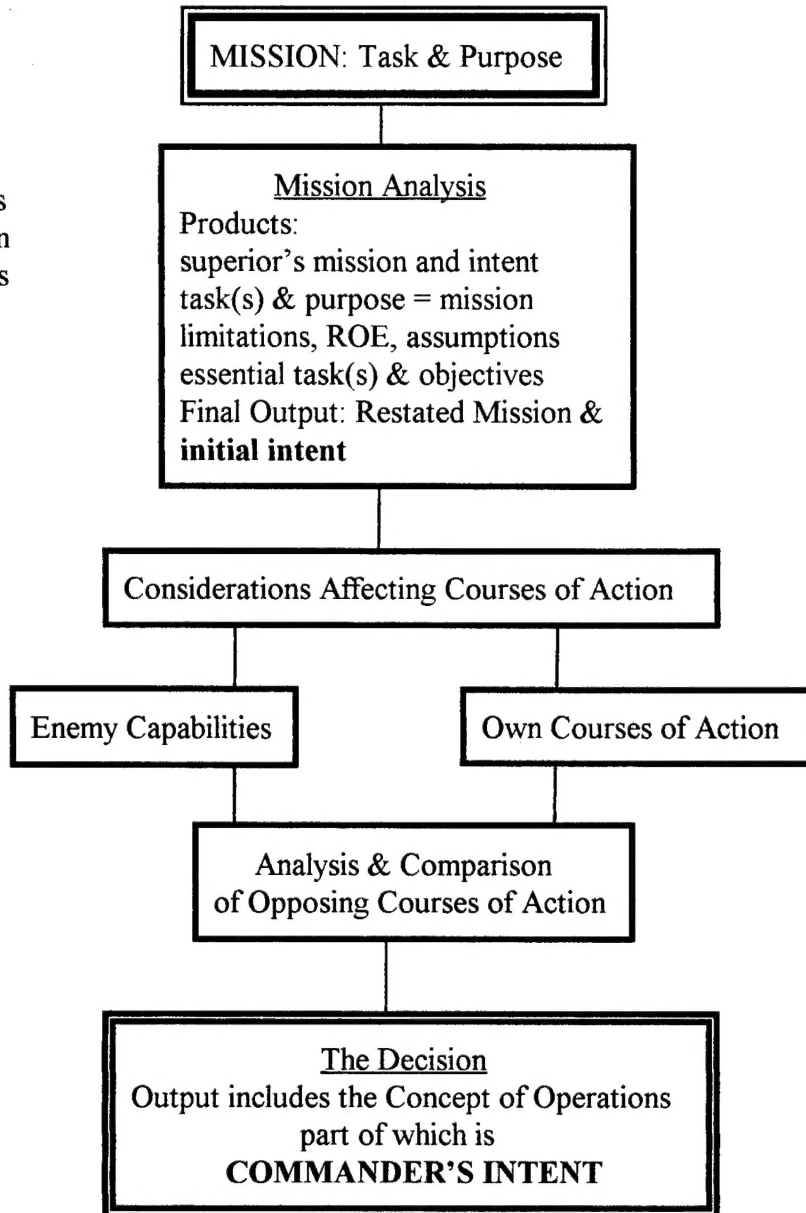
Within a given operation plan or order, there is only one commander's intent - that stated by the issuing commander. Supporting commanders, in appropriate annexes, may provide concepts for support of the plan, but they should not devise separate intent statements.

In summary, the commander's intent provides the link between the mission and how the commander 'plans' to accomplish that mission. The intent should be expressed in three or four simple sentences that clearly state why the operation is being conducted, the desired end-state, and how the force as a whole will achieve that end-state.

Figure 1

The Commander's Estimate of the Situation<sup>1</sup>

The process starts with NCA mission guidance and ends with the decision.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from undated and untitled JMO Department handout.